



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

James L. Oberstar
Chairman

Washington, DC 20515

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March 4, 2008

James W. Coon II, Republican Chief of Staff

The Honorable R. David Paulison
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Paulison:

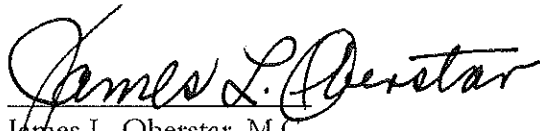
We are writing to express our concern about the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) failure to follow statutorily-mandated procedures regarding the Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program (FIRE Grants) for fiscal year (FY) 2008 and the Administration's proposal to slash this crucial program in fiscal year 2009.


Yesterday, FEMA announced the FY 2008 grant application period for FIRE Grants without first publishing notification of the availability of funds in the *Federal Register*. The Fire Grant statute, 15 USC 2229(b)(14)(A), and FEMA's regulations, 44 CFR Part 152, clearly require that a Notice of Funds Availability be published in the *Federal Register* prior to the opening of the grant period, which must include a description of the process for applying for the grants as well as the criteria for the awarding grants. Congress required advance publication to provide a consistent and transparent method of notice that the agency intends to make grant funds available. Although publication of notice in the *Federal Register* after the announcement will not bring the agency into compliance with the law, we believe such action would substantially benefit potential grant recipients and we urge FEMA to do so as soon as possible.

We are also extremely troubled by the deep cuts that the Administration has proposed to the FIRE Grant program in its FY 2009 budget, as expressed in the Views and Estimates approved by the Committee last week. This important grant program provides badly-needed Federal assistance to build the firefighting and response capabilities of fire departments and EMS organizations nationwide. The Administration proposes a mere \$300 million for FIRE Grants in FY 2009, a cut of \$260 million, or 46 percent, from the FY 2008 appropriated amount, and \$700 million, or 70 percent, from the FY 2009 authorized level of \$1 billion.

Further, the Administration's budget proposes to target FIRE Grants for terrorism in FY 2009, rather than for building basic firefighting capability for all hazards. This very limited proposal continues to ignore the purpose of this grant program as authorized by law, to protect "the health and safety of the public and firefighting personnel throughout the Nation against fire and fire-related hazards." (15 USC 2229(b)(1)(a)). Congress has repeatedly rejected past proposals offered by the Administration that ignored the critical need for communities across the country to be adequately prepared to respond to all hazards. It appears Congress will once again have to restore funding levels for this program and ensure that grants are used for authorized purposes.

Sincerely,


James L. Oberstar, M.C.
Chairman


Eleanor Holmes Norton, M.C.
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Economic
Development, Public Buildings, and
Emergency Management